DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 557 CG 016 583

AUTHOR Whitbourne, Susan Krauss; Tesch, Stephanie A.
TITLE A Comparison of Identity and Intimacy Statuses in College Students and Alumni.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (90th, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *Alumni; *College Students; Higher Education; Interpersonal Attraction; Personality Development; Psychological Characteristics; Sex Role; Student Characteristics; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *Identity Formation; *Intimacy

ABSTRACT

Previous tests of Erikson's hypothesized relationship between identity and intimacy development with undergraduate students have provided inconsistent support. To examine the possibility that college students are not developmentally prepared for intimacy crisis resolution, samples of 87 alumni and 93 college students from the same university were compared on identity and intimacy statuses based on interview ratings. More alumni were found in the identity achievement status, while college students were foreclosed in all areas (occupation, religion, politics, and sex role). Alumni were also more likely to be in the intimate and merger intimacy statuses than college students. A positive relationship between favorable resolutions of identity and intimacy crises was observed for alumni but not for college students. More college students than alumni had favorably resolved identity but not intimacy issues. The present findings support earlier research with the alumni which suggests that favorable identity crisis resolution has a strong relationship to heterosexual intimacy in adulthood and the present expectation of age differences in this relationship. (Author/JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED228557

A Comparison of Identity and Intimacy Statuses in College Students and Alumni[1]

Susan Krauss Whitbourne
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
University of Rochester

Stephanie A. Tesch
Rider College

Running Head: Identity and Intimacy in Early Adulthood

CG 016583

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Susan Krauss Whitbourne

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Previous tests of Erikson's hypothesized relationship between identity and intimacy development with undergraduate students have provided inconsistent support. The possibility that college students are not developmentally prepared for intimacy crisis resolution was investigated in the present research. Samples of 87 alumni and 93 college students from the same university were compared on identity and intimacy statuses based on interview ratings. More alumni were identity achievement, while college students were foreclosed in all areas (occupation, religion, politics, and sex role). Alumni were also more likely to be in the intimate and merger intimacy statuses than college students. A positive relationship between favorable resolutions of identity and intimacy crises was observed for alumni but not college students. More college students than alumni had favorably resolved identity issues but not intimacy. The present findings support earlier research with the alumni which suggests that favorable identity crisis resolution has a strong relationship to heterosexual intimacy in adulthood and the present expectation of age differences in this relationship.

The development of intimacy is, in Erikson's (1963) theory, a manifestation of previous psychosocial development coupled with critical issues arising during the early years of adulthood. In particular, the establishment of a sense of identity is considered essential to the young adult's ability and willingness to enter into a long-term heterosexual relationship. At the same time, internal and external forces heighten the individual's desire to be close to an adult of the opposite sex and to secure this closeness with a commitment that will maintain it. Isolation, the unfavorable resolution of this issue, may result from disturbance in either the individual's previous development or present circumstances. Another possibility that may emerge from the individual's confrontation with intimacy issues is superficial involvement in a long-term relationship without close emotional ties. (Orlofsky, Marcia, and Lesser, 1973). In a long-term relationship, there may also exist inequality of power, a form of intimacy not included in Erikson's model (Whitbourne and Weinstock, 1979).

Empirical tests of Erikson's theory have consisted of correlations between levels of identity and intimacy development. Identity development has been measured in terms of Marcia's (1966) identity statuses: alternate styles of resolving the identity versus identity diffusion crisis. Intimacy development has been operationalized on a similar basis by intimacy statuses (Orlofsky, et. al, 1973). Early research supporting Erikson's theory was conducted on all-male college students (Orlofsky, 1976; Orlofsky and Ginsburg, 1981; Orlofsky, et. al, 1973). Based on Erikson's (1965; 1975) postulate that intimacy development precedes identity resolution in women, other researchers investigated sex differences in the identity-intimacy relationship among undergraduates (Hodgson and Fischer, 1979; Kacerguis and Adams, 1980).

The tests of Erikson's theory have yielded some supportive evidence but this has not been consistent across studies. It might be expected that the identity- intimacy relationship would not be fully apparent in this age group. College students are still in the formative phases of identity development, and adult intimacy is generally not a real possibility until after the young adult has left the college campus. Thus, the previous research on samples of undergraduates may be underestimating the relationship between the two components of psychosocial development. In the present study, this possibility was tested by comparing college students and recent alumni from the same university. A positive relationship had been observed between identity and intimacy in the alumni sample (Tesch and Whitbourne, 1982). The two age groups were compared here in their levels of identity and intimacy development to determine if growth would be apparent on either or both components when alumni and undergraduates were directly compared.

Method

Sample

The college student sample consisted of 41 male and 52 female seniors at a private university in upstate New York. All were participating in a larger study of social interaction among seniors living in university housing.[2] The distributions of the sample on college major and career plans were comparable to those of the entire graduating Class of 1980 (n = 638). The 45 men and 42 women alumni in the sample ranged from 21 to 35 years old. A complete description of this sample is given in Tesch and Whitbourne (1982).

Procedure

Respondents in the college student sample were contacted by telephone toward the completion of the social interaction study. A twenty-dollar payment was offered for participation in both studies. Interviews were conducted by same-sex interviewers, who were advanced doctoral students in counseling in the school of education.[3] The identity interview always preceded the intimacy interview. The total participation time was about one hour. The procedures used in obtaining and interviewing alumni and described in Tesch and Whitbourne (1982).

Measures

The identity and intimacy interviews and rating procedures for the college students were identical to those described in Tesch and Whitbourne (1982). The two-judge inter-rater agreements were 80% (based on 40 interviews) for identity, and 76% (based on 24 interviews) for intimacy. The identity status interview yielded separate classifications for the areas of occupation, religion, politics, and sex role. An overall identity status was assigned to 69% of the sample, where at least two of the separate area ratings were identical.

The identity ratings were: Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosed, and Identity Diffuse. Individuals in the identity achievement and moratorium statuses have in common the experience of crisis. They differ in that resolution and hence commitment, has been attained only by those in the identity achievement status. The foreclosed status is characterized by a strong commitment attained without a crisis. The identity diffuse status includes people who neither have a commitment nor are particularly concerned about attaining one.

Intimacy ratings were given for long-term heterosexual, dating, and same-sex relationships. Only ratings of heterosexual (long-term or dating) intimacy were used for the present analysis. The ratings assigned were: Intimate, Merger, Pseudointimate, Preintimate, Stereotyped, and Isolate. Mutuality, sharing and commitment are the hallmarks of the intimate status. These qualities are also found in the preintimate status, but without a long-term commitment. The pseudointimate rating applies to persons who ascribe to a long-term commitment, but lack depth in the emotional aspects of the relationship. Merger denotes a relationship characterized by intimacy or a long-term commitment, but an unequal balance of power or affection. Individuals in the stereotyped status have a wide range of heterosexual relationships, but none has depth or permanance. Isolates are those who have no heterosexual relationships whatsoever, nor do they have past or future emotional ties to opposite-sex individuals.

Results

Identity Status

Since there were no sex differences within either sample, identity status comparisons were made between samples for males and females combined. The distributions of identity statuses (overall and by identity area) in the college student and alumni samples are compared in Table 1. Alumni were

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

consistently found with greater frequency in the identity achievement status. In religion, politics, and sexrole, the alumni were also located more frequently in the moratorium status. More college students were foreclosed on occupation and religion, and identity diffuse on politics and

sex role. On overall identity status, college students were more frequently located in the foreclosed and identity diffuse statuses, while a greater proportion of alumni were represented in the identity achievement status.

The distribution of intimacy statuses did not differ by sex within either the college student or alumni samples. The distributions combined over sex are shown in Table 2. A much higher proportion of the alumni were found in the intimate and merger statuses, and somewhat more in the

---

Insert Table 2 about here

---

pseudointimate. In contrast, college students were located with greater frequency in the preintimate and stereotyped statuses and slightly more in the isolate status.

The college and alumni samples were categorized into high and low identity and intimacy statuses in order to facilitate cross- sample comparisons in the joint distributions of these two dependent variables. The identity statuses of identity achievement and foreclosed were classified as "high identity", reflecting the commitment of people in these statuses to identity issues. The intimacy statuses categorized as "high" included intimate and merger because both involved long-term commitment and emotional closeness. Individual 2 x 2 chi-square tests for each identity area yielded no significant relationships between identity and intimacy for college students. In contrast, among alumni there were significant relationships ($p < .05$) between the two variables in all identity areas except sex role (χ^2 (1) = 4.93, 5.40, 8.13, and 1.99 for occupation, religion, politics, and sex role, respectively) and also for overall identity status (χ^2 (1) = 13.73, $p < .001$).

The differences between college students and alumni in the joint identity - intimacy distributions are shown in Table 3. In every comparison, there was a higher proportion of

---

Insert Table 3 about here

---

alumni than college students in the high identity--high intimacy category. In contrast, college students were found more frequently in the high identity--low intimacy group in all comparisons. In two identity areas, politics, and sex role, there was a higher percentage of college students than alumni who were in the low identity--low intimacy combination.

Discussion

The present study was conducted in order to determine wh ther previous research testing Erikson's theory regarding the positive effects of identity on intimacy development had underestimated the strength of this relationship. Undergraduate students were compared with alumni of the same academic institution on identity and intimacy with the expectation of a greater identity--intimacy relationship in the older group.

In separate analyses, more alumni were found to be in the identity achievement status, while more college students were in the foreclosed status. Both of these statuses are characterized by a firm commitment to identity issues, and in this sense are favorable resolutions of the identity versus identity diffusion psychosocial crisis. Comparison of college and alumni on intimacy status revealed more of the older group to be in emotionally close-relationships involving long-term commitments, the favorable resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis. Among alumni, identity commitment was positively related to having established a close

long-term relationship in all areas of identity except sex role. No relationships between identity and intimacy existed for the college students. Consequently, a comparison of college students and alumni on the identity--intimacy relationship revealed the college students to have resolved favorably identity, but not intimacy. The alumni were more likely to have resolved both issues favorably. In two areas, college students were also more frequently found in the category formed by low identity and low intimacy statuses. The high preponderance of college students who had either not resolved identity issues in ideology or had reached commitments in all areas without having successfully resolved intimacy issues were consistent with the expectation of a lower identity--intimacy relationship in the college compared to the post-graduation years.

In the areas of identity and intimacy, the judgment of what was a "favorable" resolution was based on a strict interpretation of Erikson's (1963) theory. It should be noted, however, that for the college students, their high frequency of placement in the foreclosed status may not reflect an adaptive resolution. To the extent that the foreclosure status is characterized by rigidity it is not psychosocially as "mature" as the identity achievement status (Waterman, 1982). Classification of the merger status as "high" intimacy raises some similar questions about what is a favorable resolution of a psychosocial crisis. This intimacy status includes people who acknowledge a form of emotional closeness in their relationship in which either they or their partners are in control. Manipulation and dependency are less adaptive forms of intimacy than the equality of give-and-take which exists in the intimate status (Whitbourne and Weinstock, 1979).

The observation of more alumni in the moratorium status in the three areas involving ideological commitments (religion, politics, and sex roles) supports the notion of continued identity development after adolescence (Erikson, 1959). If the comparison of age groups in this study does involve age rather than cohort differences, it would seem likely that the current college students may yet move out of the foreclosure status as they encounter challenges to their beliefs from adult experiences. These adult experiences may also provide the stimulus for the further development of intimacy and the establishment of long-term commitments.

Footnotes

1. Based on a paper presented at the 80th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, August 1982, Washington, D.C.
2. The cooperation is appreciated of Professors Harry Reis and Ladd Wheeler, of the Psychology Department, University of Rochester.
3. The authors wish to thank Barbara Butler, Joyce Ebmeyer, Danielle Fraenkel, Charlotte Ferree, Michael Gutter, Marie Johnson, Peter Manzi, and Anne Thomas for their help in interviewing and rating.

References

Erikson, E.H. Childhood and Society (2nd ed.) New York: Norton, 1963.

Erikson, E.H. Inner and outer space: Reflections on womanhood. In R.J. Lifton (Ed.) The woman in America. Boston: Houghton, Miflin, 1965.

Erikson, E.H. The problem of ego identity. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 1956, 4, 58-121.

Erikson, E.H. Life history and the historical moment. New York: Norton, 1975.

Hodgson, J.W., & Fischer, J.L. Sex differences in identity and intimacy development in college youth. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 1979, 8, 37-50.

Kacerguis, M.A. & Adams, G.R. Erikson stage resolution: The relationship between identity and intimacy. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 1980, 9, 117-126.

Marcia, J.E. Development and validation of ego-identity status. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 3, 551-558.

Orlofsky, J.L. Intimacy status: Relationship to interpersonal perception. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 1976, 5, 73-88.

Orlofsky, J.L. & Ginsburg, S.D. Intimacy status: Relationship to affect cognition. Adolescence, 1981, 16, 91-100.

Orlofsky, J.L. Marcia, J.E. & Lesser, I.M. Ego identity status and the intimacy versus isolation crisis of young adulthood. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1973, 27, 211-219.

Tesch, S.A. and Whitbourne, S.K. Intimacy and identity status in young adults. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1982, 43, 1041-1051.

Waterman, A.S. Identity development from adolescence to adulthood: An extension of theory and a review of research. Developmental Psychology, 1982, 18, 341-358.

Whitbourne, S.K. & Weinstock, C.S. Adult development: The differentiation of experience. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979.

Table 1

Identity Status Distributions in College and Alumni Samples

Area	Sample	Identity Achievement		Moratorium		Foreclosed		Identity Diffuse		χ^2[a]
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Occupation	College	34	36.56	3	3.23	50	53.76	6	6.45	12.82
	Alumni	46	53.49	4	4.66	24	27.91	12	13.95	
Religion	College	14	15.05	2	2.15	48	51.61	29	31.18	14.85
	Alumni	24	27.91	8	9.30	23	26.74	31	36.05	
Politics	College	5	5.38	0	0.00	24	25.81	64	68.82	23.19
	Alumni	21	24.41	7	8.14	13	15.12	45	52.33	
Sex Role	College	9	9.78	0	0.00	33	35.87	50	54.35	50.74
	Alumni	25	29.07	22	25.58	25	29.07	14	16.28	
Overall	College	7	10.94	1	1.56	30	46.88	26	40.63	17.90
	Alumni	25	41.67	3	5.00	15	25.00	17	28.33	

[a]Note: All X^2 values significant at $p<.001$, $df = 3$.

Table 2

Intimacy Status Distributions in College and Alumni Samples

Sample	Status												
	Intimate		Merger		Pseudo-intimate		Preintimate		Stereotyped		Isolate		χ^2
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
College	20	21.51	5	5.38	41	44.09	7	7.53	13	13.98	7	7.53	24.60[a]
Alumni	34	40.00	13	15.29	22	25.88	11	12.94	1	1.18	4	4.71	

a $df = 5$, $p < .001$

Table 3

Identity-intimacy Relationships in College Student and Alumni Samples

Area	Sample	High Identity				Low Identity				χ^2[a]
		High Intimacy		Low Intimacy		High Intimacy		Low Intimacy		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Occupation	College	22	23.66	62	66.67	3	3.23	6	6.45	21.22
	Alumni	42	50.00	27	32.14	4	4.76	11	13.09	
Religion	College	17	18.28	45	48.39	8	8.60	23	24.73	19.61
	Alumni	31	36.91	16	19.05	15	17.86	22	26.19	
Politics	College	8	8.60	21	25.30	17	18.28	47	50.54	17.83
	Alumni	25	29.76	9	10.71	21	25.00	29	34.52	
Sex Role	College	9	9.78	33	35.87	16	17.39	34	36.96	19.00
	Alumni	30	35.71	19	22.62	16	19.05	19	22.62	
Overall	College	8	12.50	29	45.31	6	9.38	21	32.81	19.40
	Alumni	28	47.46	12	20.34	4	6.78	15	25.42	

[a]Note: All $\underline{X}$ values significant at $p < .001$, $\underline{df} = 3$